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ABSTRACT

In this paper the physical characteristics of community sites that are common gathering places for adolescents are described and recommendations are given for improving their use. It is suggested that there are some common factors in the society and in the organization of many towns and cities in the United States that contribute to the appearance of a nationwide pattern in young people's choices and uses of public spaces in their leisure time. This pattern of choices includes places such as the street corner and corner store, the shopping center and shopping mall, the school yard and playgrounds, the libraries, museums and galleries, the streets and plazas, parks, old city streets and neighborhoods, new housing developments, automobiles and parking lots, and private places or public places out of public view. Comments on the advantages and disadvantages of each of these settings for the social use of teenagers are presented. (Author/SS)

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TEENAGERS IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PLACES

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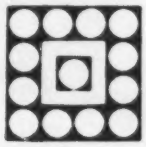

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WHEN TEENAGERS ARE NOT IN SCHOOL AND NOT AT HOME, WHERE ARE THEY?

The question, "Do you know where your teenager is?", inserted between late evening radio and television programs must raise the anxieties of hundreds of thousands of parents of urban and suburban adolescents in the US. Ask that question at any hour and more than a few parents indeed might wonder where their children are. Where and how do teenagers spend their time when they are neither in school nor at home?

At any given hour the possible places where one may find one's adolescent offspring indeed may seem infinite. Certainly, they are more mobile than were their parents two or three decades ago when they were teenagers. The radius of the home range of the average adolescent boy or girl has expanded considerably since WWII when the parents of the contemporary adolescent generation were kids. Despite the variety and challenge presented by a wider geographic range, the settings where kids are likely to be found are relatively readily identifiable. A stranger in town, in almost any town, with an awareness of the social and personal requirements of adolescents and the ecology of adolescent activities would be able to specify many settings where the adolescents in the town could be located. Weather permitting, they will be out-of-doors in places that offer them some seclusion and, at the same time, vantage points from which they may view the action of passers-by. Their favorite public places are likely to be situated near a busy corner or intersection or along a strip of street or road where they have visual access to pedestrian and vehicular traffic, locations where their opportunities to see and be seen will be increased. Parking lots also afford them access to the comings and goings of other people and offer the excitement of the unexpected encounter. They may be found on playing fields, playgrounds or in the vicinity of public schools, places that are or were intentional territories for children and youth. During a tour of a shopping mall or shopping center one may find sites that frequently are occupied by youngsters.

Let us consider the physical characteristics of sites that are common gathering places for adolescents. The purpose of the array of sites which follows is to suggest that there are some common factors in the society and in the organization of many towns and cities in the US that contribute to the appearance of a nation-wide pattern in young people's choices and uses of public spaces in their leisure time. Along with the descriptions of the places are comments on the advantages and disadvantages of those settings for the social uses of teenagers.

STREET CORNER AND CORNER STORE

The vanishing "American" corner store, whether candy store, drug store or variety store, once was a node of adolescent activity in a vast number of US cities and towns that varied in scale, character, and social composition. What was it about the corner store that rendered it a suitable gathering place for the younger generation over several decades?

The corner store of the first half of the 20th century fulfilled some of the social functions associated with the general store in the preceeding century. Centrally located, the stores retailed a sufficient range of items to draw a representative group of customers from an entire community. A few such stores have survived and serve as gathering places or hangouts. In fair weather, clusters of boys and separate clusters of girls sit, stand and lean near the entrances of corner stores -- hanging out, watching the local action or simply waiting for it. In inclement weather, there may be a corner for them inside where they are allowed to linger. (In days gone by there were soda fountains where they might sit and draw interminably on a 5¢ Coke.) A few examples remain and appear to thrive, although many of their owners probably feel threatened by the trend toward shopping centers that force them to put up the "going out of business" sign.

The location of the corner store is significant. To be sure, not every variety, candy or drug store that occupies a corner site is a drawing place for teenagers. It is not the site alone that renders the place conducive to their comings and goings. Rather, it is a combination of physical and social factors that contribute to the choice of a place as a hangout, a gathering place, an occasion-related space (Ellis, 197). The environmental characteristics that are common to such corner places are these:

1. They are centrally located
2. They afford visual access to a point of activity, e.g., an intersection
3. They present opportunities for social contact and comment

The social characteristics of such sites are not as readily identifiable. The socio-economic composition of the surrounding area, mores of the community and the policy regarding management of the store all combine to determine the presence or absence of teenagers at a corner store. The acceptance of teenagers rests in part on acquaintance with other members of their households and recognition of the teenagers themselves as members of the community.

Is the corner store gone forever as a gathering place? Have changes in commercial patterns, neighborhood size and attitudes toward adolescents caused them to be viewed as unacceptable in places used by the entire community? To be sure- changes in transportation and communication patterns have rendered neighborhood corners less active places. Before the corner

store vanishes entirely, urban designers should attempt to extract the physical and social "essence" of those sites which can be included in future urban gathering places that will serve teenagers and adults as hangouts.

SHOPPING CENTER AND SHOPPING MALL

The commercial entities that appear to be the successors to corner stores as gathering places for young people are the ubiquitous shopping centers and malls. Large, anonymous and regional in social composition and physical character (like the high schools many attend), they attract a wide range of mobile young people. Arriving by car, van, motorcycle and bicycle, they come to centers and malls where by day and into the night there are record shops, clothing stores, book stores, "fast food" restaurants and cinemas which offer shopping, dining, and entertainment opportunities. There may also be benches, ledges and fountains where they may sit, wait and watch others pass by...if the management permits. If there is a high level of concern about security in shopping malls and concern about the "image" of the mall, teenagers may experience heavy surveillance and expulsion. Concern about conflict between adolescent users and more affluent shoppers is often responsible for a policy that results in declaring "off limits" to teenagers available seating in public areas of shopping centers and malls.

It is important to recognize the appeal of shopping malls and centers to teenagers. The design of centers and malls and policies regarding their use should not convey the schizophrenogenic message:

COME IN...<u>BUT</u> DO NOT STAY

PLEASE BUY...<u>BUT GO</u> AWAY!

Rather they should afford space, conditions and activities expressly for teenage users. Developers of shopping centers, after all, have contributed to the disappearance of the corner stores that used to serve teenagers rather well. The development of a new commercial form to replace old ones represents only a physical replacement; the social need for face-to-face interaction with familiar faces is not fulfilled by the large scale clientele drawn to shopping centers. Centrally located centers within shopping malls and centers should be created for teenagers and others in search of information and interactions that public gathering places ought to provide. A fine example of a center within a mall exists in Strasbourg near the University of Louis Pasteur where there is a glass enclosed pavillion situated in the center of the interior of the mall in what would otherwise be "dead" space. The pavillion is lined with pinball machines and when I observed there in June 1976 it was filled at various hours with boys who appeared to be between 10 and 16 years old, all passionately engaged in the excitement of their pinball games. Just a few feet from the pinball pavillion was a cafe patronized by young girls, an avid audience for the pinball activity and several adults, young, middle-aged and old, who also appeared to enjoy the action. What a happy interface of age groups and activities! Does it happen only in Strasbourg or can Dallas, Des Moines and Dayton generate that type of mix, too?

THE SCHOOL: STEPS, YARD AND PLAYGROUNDS

No matter what the prevailing attitude of teenagers, their parents, and their communities toward the local public schools, school sites and adjacent facilities are frequently used during after-school hours and on weekends as hangouts or gathering places for kids. Facilities familiar to them and intended for their use are often the sites of unexpected uses after hours. School steps and school yards serve as locations for hanging out. Relatively safe as a hang-out with respect to the legitimacy of their using school facilities, teenagers gravitate toward places where they have a territorial claim.

Relatively certain as a place where they may find other kids, there they sit on the steps of the school and eventually a peer or two will come along. They find little other than steps, ledges and window sills to afford them a modicum of comfort while they wait for friends to gather to plan how to pass the time of day. There rarely are benches in the vicinity of schools although there often are periods of waiting outside schools. Primary schools often have a daily assemblage of mothers and sitters who arrive and await the dismissal of younger students. Older students in secondary schools wait during recess and between classes. They must wait for the arrival of buses and cars. Secondary schools surely should provide suitable places for waiting.

The idea of developing educational parks to contain school facilities, students and teachers, offers an opportunity for surrounding schools with park-like amenities that would suite the requirements of after-school users as well as routine users. School grounds would be equipped with benches, permanent chess or checkerboard tables, a small-scale amphitheater, sites for vendors, rubbish cans, suitable lighting, and so forth. These amenities would permit safer and improved uses of school sites as places for the leisure activities of teenagers.

The development of after-school programs and the expanded use of school buildings has drawn teenagers and others to schools after school hours. More explicit discussions regarding the use of school land and facilities and the need for the type of space schools afford should shape differently land use policies of schools and recreation areas.

Recreational uses of school playgrounds, ball courts and playing fields present fewer problems than the use of school interiors. In most communities teenagers are encouraged to "play ball" on the facilities intended primarily for school use. After school and weekend uses of sports facilities by teenagers is commonly accepted. The loneliness of the solitary basketball perfectionist who dribbles and tosses through the hoop his well practiced shots on a school basketball court is not an unfamiliar sight.

While there are frequent examples of teenage boys using recreational facilities, their use by teenage girls is less frequent. Except for tennis and skating, active after-school uses of recreational facilities by teenage girls

is considerably less than by boys. The teenage girl as spectator to the active sports of teenage boys and the play of young children on playgrounds and tot lots in the vicinity of schools is likely to be the more common occurrence. The environmental dynamic, of course, requires that teenage girls as spectators must be situated so that they can be seen as well as see. Just as their male counterparts need a field on which they can demonstrate their abilities, girls too need a suitable situation for the public display of their skills and talents. Often, as Entel has reported, this takes the form of their demonstrating their maturity and their capacity to be responsible for others in their undertaking the supervision of younger kids who are in the same area to play or observe. Suitable places for them to enact their roles with dignity and comfort should be provided.

QUASI-EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS: LIBRARIES, MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

It is difficult to obtain reliable estimates from libraries, museums and art galleries of the number of users who can be categorized as teenagers. Certainly some of their number with clipboard or notebook in hand have been sent in search of material to fulfill a school assignment. Others, perhaps independently motivated, make their way more or less purposefully through library stacks or the exhibits in museums and galleries alone or with a peer or two. Niches in the public libraries of some communities serve social functions for the scholarly teerager. Although they may not view themselves as hanging out in the library, their interaction, albeit considerably quieter, resembles that of their counterparts on street corners. Use of public libraries as hangouts or gathering places for teenagers depends on the policy of the management and the mood of the librarian-in-charge on a given day. When space and the missions of other users permit, public libraries should extend their facilities to meet the need of some teenagers for a place to linger. The after-school employment of teenagers by libraries probably encourages teenage users. The appropriation of library space by teenagers in ways that do not infringe on the library experience of other users should be allowed.

Young teenagers, alone or with peers, give the impression that they are uncertain about their legitimacy in museums and art galleries. Their uncertainty is no doubt in response to the intentional image of such places, reinforced by the manner of guards and gatekeepers who non-verbally communicate that the museum or gallery is for adults primarily and secondarily for children and youth accompanied by parents or teachers. Young teenagers unaccompanied by adults are viewed as undesirables or, at best, suspect. Intimidated by the facade of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, two well-dressed, white girls of 13 or 14 years asked me as I approached the Museum recently on a Saturday afternoon whether I thought they would be allowed to go in without a parent or another adult!

The relatively recent practice of employing teenagers as museum guides and resource persons is enormously heartening. Just as the presence of the

teenage library assistant announces to their peers that they are wanted there, the teenage museum staff member is a welcoming sign to his or her peers and often an approachable source of information about exhibits or facilities.

STREETS AND PLAZAS

Designed as public place for a wide range of users, some streets, and plazas afford areas that for a period at least seem particularly attractive to groups of teenagers. What are the characteristics and contexts of some such public places that teenagers make their own? How are they officially and unofficially designated? Territorialized? What does the presence of teenagers mean for other users?

There is an important temporal element in the appropriation of such places by teenagers. Generally there is no formal designation of sections of streets and plazas as theirs. Rather there is the recognition that during certain hours (sometimes formally arrived at) they may use the site for activities that tend to dominate or determine other contemporaneous uses. During the 1960s when the "flower children" took to the streets of the US, some areas were invaded and captured by the segments of the "youth culture." San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury was the most renowned of those territorial victories. In other cities, too, street corners, city parks, and commons fell into younger hands. Since then other users (with the aid of city ordinances, "renewal" and the police) have regained lost territory, yet some enclaves that brought forth new uses of US streets remain. Street vendors, jugglers, musicians, mimes, now may be found on streets and in plazas and squares that serve a heterogeneous population. The preponderance of people under 40 years old sometimes gives the impression that there are some streets and plazas that belong to the young. Look closely to find what is there that fits the requirements of the teenage user. Entertainment abounds. The living theater of passers-by, extravagant characters as intentional street entertainers, the array of trendy goods on display in shop windows -- all contribute to the type of visual stimulation that can be termed "entertainment." Teenagers can move relatively unobtrusively through the youthful crowds that populate such places. They may even pause when there is a spectacle to observe. Yet they should not linger too long outside some commercial establishments, for it is feared that teenagers will inhibit the flow of other pedestrian users or that their presence will devalue the quality of the establishment. Merely because they can be ordered by policemen also in search of "the action" to "move on" they are made to feel unwanted on a street that otherwise seems to have unrestricted use. Even in the "country of the young" teenagers are singled out for humiliating treatment which has little to do with occupancy per se of the place, rather it has to do with the age and image of the occupant and different interpretations of the verb, "to loiter."

PARKS

Next to young children accompanied by parents, teenage boys are probably the most frequent users of urban parks near residential areas. The open space of parks affords a place for biking, ballgames and battles--real and imaginary. Violent incidents involving teenagers as victims and victimizers which have occurred in parks have raised issues about "turf" in parks and the defensibility of the enjoyment of urban parks. Rather than diverting landscape architects in designing defensible parks, we should devise programs that will enlist youthful users in insuring the safety and security of users of parks. Giving them access to emergency telephones and alarm devices, encouraging their participation in park programs (e.g., Herter Center) and providing theater, puppet shows and concerts on a regular basis will attract active, diverse use to parks.

Parks offer the possibility of retreat for some urban youngsters as a place where one can walk, run or ride alone or in the company of a friend or two. In some urban areas, parks afford access to the natural environment which would otherwise be unavailable on a day to day basis. Teenagers' preferences for sites within parks probably depend on the overall environmental context surrounding the park, their specific park uses, and the requirements of other user groups. Accessibility to the park and park facilities largely determine frequency and type of use. Parks that are attractive to teenagers are probably those that a broad spectrum of persons in other age groups also want to use. In every US city there is typically one park that can be cited as an example of a park that serves teenagers and other users well. Typically there is only one park that can be so mentioned. There are important programming notions to be derived from those well used parks and explanations of their use to be elicited from the users.

OLD CITY STREETS AND NEIGHBORHOODS

Suttles' (196) description of the summer street scene in the Addams area evokes images of numerous urban streets in old quarters of US cities and towns where the architecture of "brownstones," row houses, or town houses with doorways and stoops that afford an orchestra seat view of the theater of the street. Less common are such streets now than they were a few decades ago. Still they exist. For some teenagers the drama of day to day scenes enacted on those streets has a compelling charm that holds them there on the edge of their doorway seats eagerly awaiting the next act in comic and tragic exchanges between neighbors.

Pass through such a street, or, if you live there, look out your window and there you may find a number of teenagers who live on the block. For them home is where the action is. No need to wander, to stray, to visit a park or go for a joy ride. The action is at the edge of the stairs or cer-

tainly no further away than the house next door. They contribute to the air of theater with their spirited street games and the occasionally sparkling repartee between articulate adversaries who have extraordinary vocabularies of derogatory terms, street cliches and the latest slang.

Many such old streets and neighborhoods still exist. Greater variety in the life styles of urban dwellers and increasing heterogeneity among the residents of old neighborhoods, however, reduced the number of areas that contain their teenagers with the appeal of interesting, unstructured street life. Old neighborhoods with their relatively small scale structures and street-oriented residents have been diminished to make way for high rise apartments, housing developments and modern living.

IN AND AROUND NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

It has been noted frequently that new housing developments, even those planned with the assistance of the most able sociologists, do not accommodate the social and environmental needs of their teenage residents. Cooper (1975) and Marcus (1975) have reported on the dearth of recreational opportunities in two otherwise rather well-appointed California housing developments. Respondents to Brower and Williamson's (1974) into outdoor recreation in the vicinity of two housing developments in Baltimore elicited complaints about the absence of recreational options for teenagers. A significant segment of the teenage populations of new towns is disturbingly visible because teenagers have not been drawn in their leisure hours to the places and programs intended to occupy them.

If you live in or near a large housing development, where are your kids likely to spend their time? In the absence of attractive recreational, entertainment or other commerical settings, some teenagers are likely to be found in or on the perimeter of the communal parking facility. Parking lots and garages afford access to the comings and goings of residents and their guests, especially in automobile-dependent populations. Or if public transportation is heavily used, it is advantageous to establish a look-out qua gathering place within view of the bus stop or subway exit. When there is little else to do, the arrival or departure of a neighbor, acquaintance, a familiar face or, better, a newcomer provides a twinge of excitement. And so they sit and, as casually as possible, they wait in the spirit and style of hanging out. It is an understimulating visual and social experience for many teenagers who respond appropriately with anger at the way they are made to feel conspicuous and unessential in a setting that affords them few opportunities for the expression of their social and recreational requirements. The absence of suitable environments for their requirements may account for, in part, evidence of vandalism and abuse of property in housing developments. Successful housing developments must offer more than housing if there are teenagers among the residents. In addition to suitable recreation facilities, they should provide seating near active points of entry that would be used by residents of all ages. Attractive gathering places would enhance the social appeal of some developments and increase the surveilance and security in public areas.

AUTOMOBILES AND PARKING LOTS

The automobile has attained enormous social and symbolic significance in the experience of teenagers in the US. The importance of the auto for transportation is, of course, paramount among teenagers who live in areas where public transportation is inadequate or virtually non-existent. The attainment of a driver's license is perhaps the only rite-de-passage experienced by many adolescents during the years of transition from childhood to adulthood.

Goldberg (1967) studied adolescents social uses of the automobile in Los Angeles. The automobile is a mechanism for initiating social contact in many urban and rural settings. Cruising, among teenagers who rely mainly on transportation by automobile, is an important aspect of their social routine. Automobile theft, which ranks relatively high among the offenses in which teenagers are involved, allows a few teenagers limited access to cars. The amount of time older teenagers spend in cars is no doubt considerable. Where do they go? What do they do? Some teenagers go parking, a phenomenon which transforms the ordinary car into a living room or bedroom or smoking room or bar, depending on the company and provisions. The romantic settings for parking that one readily could find on the outskirts of most US towns in the 1930s and 40s are less common now. Instead, the parking lots of shopping centers serve as a place to park and sit, drink beer and talk -- or whatever. Less conspicuous amid other cars than parked along a traditional "lovers' lane," the driver and his/her companions are not likely to be disturbed by the police. At the end of the evening they leave only empty beer cans as evidence of their having been there. The evidence that is left behind is a demonstration available after some weeknights and every weekend of the cafes and lounges that older teenagers would use if they were allowed to socialize publicly.

Gurin (1974) in his intensive study of the physical mobility of working class suburban boys extracts from his interviews elements of an ideal transportation system appropriate for the numerous unstructured, informal activities to which they journey. On an experimental basis a few communities should attempt to modify their public transportation systems, organizing private transportation around the travel patterns of its teenage population. Increasing road safety would be only one of the benefits. A decrease in automobile theft might be another. The combination of these benefits should encourage the serious consideration of transportation programs oriented toward the requirements of teenagers.

OTHER PLACES: INTERIOR PLACES, PRIVATE PLACES, SECRET PLACES, PUBLIC PLACES OUT OF PUBLIC VIEW

It is my guess that only a small segment of teenage activity is available to the public. A greater portion of the time and activities of teenagers is spent in places that are essentially private. According to all reports, teenager girls spend a considerable amount of leisure time at their homes or in the homes of friends. Many boys probably spend a significant amount

of time in domestic settings, too. I know of no reliable time budget surveys of US teenagers that provides data needed to address precisely the question of how and where they spend their time. My occasional attempt to ascertain systematically how teenagers serving as panelists spent their weekdays and weekends resulted in reports with significant amounts of time unexplained.

Time spent away from home is often spent in the homes of friends where they do homework together, watch TV, listen to records, engage in a hobby or game and, invariably eat. Often the homes of some friends have more appeal than friends' homes for reasons that probably have more to do with parental attitudes and style of management rather than environmental features. Research on the factors associated with homes (other than their own) preferred by teenagers may reveal the attitudes and amenities that could be profitably incorporated by organizations and institutions interested in providing comfortable settings for teenage users, as well as by parents who would prefer to have their own teenagers hang out at home.

In blighted, low income areas, a home away from home may be found in an abandoned house. Claude Brown's account of the use of a condemned building in upper Harlem as a home of a group of young people ranging in age from 14 to 22 years. It is only in periods of desperation that a handful of teenagers create homes of their own in places no longer fit to house human life. Instances of long term occupancy by teenagers in abandoned housing are probably rare. The occasional use of abandoned buildings as club houses, hide aways, secret places, and places for private moments for which no better place can be found is not uncommon in the experience of urban adolescents, particularly those who live in or near relatively poor neighborhoods. The sense of excitement and adventure that is associated with the use of a condemned, indeed forbidden, building must heighten the value of the place in the eyes of daring teenagers. Is it excitement that is sought or are they merely seeking a place for a private or intimate experience? It is difficult in a society that associates privacy with sexuality and that is highly ambivalent about adolescent sexuality to acknowledge that teenagers require places that afford them privacy where they can explore in an atmosphere that supports their dignity the behavioral tendencies they experience.

The need for appropriate places for privacy is more acute among teenagers from low income backgrounds which afford families relatively little residential space per capita. A few community organizations that serve the adolescents of poorer communities have responded to this requirement by providing lounges and small sitting rooms in the community facilities to provide a relatively private space resembling a living room where they may be alone or with a close friend without relatives and neighbors present as chaperons, spies, kibitzers or witnesses.

Teenagers who enjoy the environmental (and other) advantages of the middle and upper classes have a choice of locations in their homes and the homes

of friends and often the option of more than one home in which to spend leisure time with a peer. Although there is the researcher's interest in the interior environments they select for their leisure activities, it seems more important to pursue studies that will lead to an understanding of how low income teenagers and organizations that serve them might appropriate, shape and maintain interior settings suitable for their use.

PREVIEW

The subsequent chapters include analyses of sites, facilities and behaviors that are part of the public and private experience of contemporary teenagers in the US. The situations and behaviors selected for analysis appear to be relevant to the lives of teenagers throughout the society, without regard to region or race, ethnicity or class. From time to time, the circumstances of poorer teenagers will be emphasized. If recommendations for improvements in environments and facilities for lower socioeconomic groups appear more prominent it is only because their unmet requirements announce themselves more distinctly.